

WHY I AM A MEMBER OF THE BRETHREN CHURCH.

BY J. M. BOWMAN.

I shall not speak of the motives which led me to join the church, nor of what prompted me to become a member of the Brethren church. I will speak of why I now am in the church and of the things that hold me to the Brethren church.

I am convinced that Jesus is the son of the only God and the only being who with the Holy Spirit reveals God to man. I take the Bible to be the record of this revelation. It is Jesus Christ speaking to us. When I believe the first I can do nothing but look to him for directions that will point me to that which is pleasing in the sight of God. When I believe the last I can do nothing but be directed in every particular by the Bible.

It is clear that the word *church* in the New Testament is intended to convey different ideas. But we can not be mistaken in thinking that God wishes to have an assembly or gathering together of his followers into a body and that he is pleased to have all the world connected with this body. Jesus said, "My church." Matt. 16:18. Paul, "The church of God," Acts 20:28, and a number of other places. The same apostle also speaks of the church as the body of Christ. Eph. 1:22. "Christ is the head of the church." Eph. 5:28. "As Christ also loved the church and gave himself for it." Eph. 5:25. "The church of God (or the Lord,) which he purchased with his own blood." Acts 20:28. I am sure that just the mere belonging to church is in its self not a sure evidence that one is in harmony with God's will. But I am just as confident that those who do his whole pleasure will be openly and publicly with the professing church even if outwardly and to human eyes she is still not without blot. Christ loves the church and gave himself for it, and bought it with his blood. "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Surely there is yet existing the church of which Christ is the head. Surely all of the followers of Christ will be members of his church and love it and give themselves for its good. I must follow God in all of his appointed ways and hence I love and serve the church.

The sects or organizations into which the professing church is divided, has little to do in determining who are members of the church of Jesus. Some of them have much to do in keeping men and women from really being what God would have them be. No one organization contains all of the followers of Christ neither are all of the members of any one general organization, members of the church of

which Jesus is the head. The body of Christ is made up of individuals. "I am the vine, ye are the branches." "If a man abide not in me he is cut off." "My Father is the husbandman" and hence does the cutting. It is not left to men or organizations to do the cutting, for one day they cut off a branch and the next day with no change whatever take it up and graft it back, as they think. Though no doubt those who closely follow Christ and accept the guidance of the Holy Spirit can do much to advance the church. "Why then be particular about belonging to any certain church or organization if it may be that those who do not belong to it may also be members of the church of God?" some one may ask.

Christ is the foundation of our salvation and final acceptance with God. "If ye be in Christ, then are ye Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise." Gal. 3:29. "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he has built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire." 1 Cor. 3:11-15. From the word of inspiration here it is shown that one may be on the foundation and hence be accepted and saved of God and receive a reward in addition to that, and another be on the same foundation and finally accepted at the same time and in the same way and yet suffer loss. One may be saved and receive a reward. Another may be saved and suffer loss. "My words shall judge you in the last day" said Jesus. Surely then he who faithfully follows all of the teachings of Jesus and the apostles, can not suffer loss. Other things *may do*, but God's word is sure and steadfast.

The Brethren church has no confidence in any thing as a means of salvation other than Jesus Christ as revealed in the New Testament. She leads me to that fountain and leaves me there, with the Holy Spirit, to drink to the very bottom of the well of salvation. She has no faith in the theory that Jesus, were he here now, might teach us to follow different forms of service and worship and hence she follows the plain simple teachings of the New Testament in all of her practices and trusts it in all of its promises. Nothing short of this can fully please God. I want to fulfill every wish of God and of course I yield willing service to him in the Brethren church the only organization that I know of that gives the liberty of the whole gospel.

CHRIST OUR SHEPHERD.

BY T. G. WOOD.

"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." This is one among the most blessed thoughts in the Bible to me. Now simply declaring the Lord to be our shepherd is one thing, and feeling in our hearts that he is our shepherd and our king is another. To call Christ our shepherd, and not to believe that he will provide for us, to doubt whether he will be near us in trouble, to fear lest he will leave us to want, and not defend us in danger, are just so many contradictions. Oh how easy and natural it becomes for us to say, he is my shepherd, but let us, my brother or sister, think earnestly along this line. Let us study our own lives. How often do our doubts and fears, our misgivings and anxieties, and general dissatisfaction with our lot, declare that he is not our shepherd. Let us not be as a man beholding his natural face in a glass and immediately after turning away forget what manner of man he was. If we, with the Psalmist David, can say, "The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want," then let us not turn around and go to reaching out with both hands after the riches of this world and then grumbling because our arms are so short and saying we have not got as good a crop as we should have had; it is all we can do to live, I don't know what we are going to do. And if a brother asks us to subscribe for the church paper let us not say we are not able. Now if we trust the Lord as our shepherd, he will supply our wants, then we can say, "I shall not want." Then let us not again say: We don't know how we are going to make a living, for we could not live one hour without the Lord. Whom then shall we trust for life and salvation?

We speak as if he were our friend, but we feel, live and act many times as if his friendship were not real. The lurking distrust we entertain accuses this shepherd of insincerity and unfaithfulness, in undertaking an office the duties of which he is not able to fulfill. Let us flee from such impiety and wickedness, and put away all doubts and fears. The good shepherd appoints to each of his flock their proper quality and quantity of pasture. The sheep must leave all things to the judgment of the shepherd, for what shepherd is he who leaves his flock to hunger? Is he worthy of the name who leaves his sheep exposed to the ravages of the wolves? I am glad to think I am not bound to make the world go right; but only to discover and do with cheerful heart the work that God appoints. Then let us trust him for he is able to hold his own.

Ft. Scott, Kans.